



MEDIA STATEMENT BY AFRICAN MONITOR

Warning that high levels of poverty will persist until rural infrastructure is improved

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For immediate release

It is estimated that more than 415 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa rely on agriculture to eke out their living, and the lack of focused investment in infrastructure in rural areas is hampering productivity and growth in the sector.

So says Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, President of African Monitor during the organisation's high-level forum, *Breaking of Bread with the Archbishop* held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 11 May 2012.

The annual forum, hosted by African Monitor, an organisation that monitors development funding commitments, delivery as well as the impact it has on grassroots communities, is attended by a select group of policy and opinion makers from Africa. Its aim is to influence current thinking on development issues.

"Although infrastructure has been recognised as an important market access tool, in most instances, such access has mainly been conceived in terms of benefitting investors and big players instead of addressing the realities and aspirations of the ordinary person," said Archbishop Ndungane.

"Investment in rural infrastructure that supports small-holder agriculture is fundamental."

The Archbishop said that while it could be argued that infrastructure development will ultimately benefit grassroots communities, by not consulting with and including them at every stage of development, countries run the risk of providing the wrong infrastructure for them. They also risk providing infrastructure that fails to give the grassroots a base from which they can support and sustain their livelihoods. Such consultation should occur from the planning to the delivery stages.

"There has been very little growth in the agricultural sector for the last three decades in the continent due to the lack of infrastructure, agricultural inputs and technology," he said. "The International Fund for Agricultural Development's 2011 Rural Poverty Report cited these areas as some of the main factors that contribute to rural poverty in Africa."

"This sector needs improvements that will boost their access to transport, communication, energy, water, irrigational facilities and extension services. The availability of such infrastructure is generally inadequate in Africa.

"By just providing feeder roads that enables rural farmers to take their produce to the market or the means and access to purchase high-quality seeds and equipment, a significant difference will be made to the sector. It will promote and accelerate agricultural productivity and is relatively inexpensive to achieve."

Archbishop Ndungane also said that if capacity is created by countries through the provision of relatively cheap but essential infrastructure to the people at grassroots levels that promotes their economic services agenda, they will provide a solid basis for attracting and financing the ever popular huge and capital intensive infrastructure projects.